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Government Must Say It's Sorry

The rights of thousands of Americans were abused by Central Intelligence Agency mail-monitoring programs.

Now the federal courts are beginning to level punishment against the agency for its illegal activities of the past.

A federal district judge in Brooklyn, N.Y., awarded \$1,000 and court costs to each of three plaintiffs whose correspondence with people in the Soviet Union had been opened by the CIA. The judge also ordered the government to write an apology to the plaintiffs.

A few grand and an apology won't by themselves restore citizens' faith in

government or, specifically, in the CIA.

However, if the government accepts this first court ruling, the symbolic gestures of payment and apology will give plaintiffs in this and other pending cases some satisfaction that government recognizes the wrongdoing of its past.

Executive order has halted the mail opening program. The Justice Department has said it will prosecute any mail opening now.

The CIA must take its lumps for past misdeeds while making efforts now at rebuilding confidence among the American people in its operations.